

# *Paradigm Lost? A Belated Response to Jarvis and Atselarat from Japan*

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## Abstract

This submission is the first of two papers, both of which examine and challenge the preconceived and often ill-informed notions held by instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many Asian settings. It was Jarvis and Atsilarat's recent publication in *Asian EFL Journal*, which takes issue with the suitability of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology for the Asian context that prompted us to undertake a reflective review of the literature and undertake our own research. While it is one matter to disavow any paradigm, theory or set of theories, and corresponding methodology; it is indeed quite another to outright dismiss such on the basis of some vague findings with an ill-equipped instrument.

This initial paper provides a detailed review of the literature which takes stock of a range of theory and related topic discussion, situated in the broader heuristic paradigm, that lends credence to the position being that, CLT-if correctly interpreted and adequately integrated—is no less appropriate for modernizing Asian cultural settings, than it is in so many others.

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The second follow-on paper will provide a comparative analysis of the research from Jarvis and Atsilarat's (2004) study on the Thailand context; Savignon and Wang's (2003) examination of that in Taiwan; and, our own detailed survey research of the Japanese setting. The second paper will conclude with an overview of the comparative features of the said studies. Such should offer some added insight as to how, with some educational contextual adjustments, adoption of CLT methodology could prove less problematic, if not more endearing to its stakeholders in the Asian EFL context.

## Introduction

'There is something about us as humans and our relationship to language that I think is going to transcend individual situations and context, but you should know that's a volatile issue right now.' (Larsen-Freeman *in Ancker*, 2001:2)

I commence with an expression of gratitude to Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) for their contribution to the on-going debate on the appropriateness of communicative methodological practice in English language teaching (TESOL) environment. A persistent questioning of theory and methods with a view to the existence of there being "no one best methodology" for every type of learner, or group of learners, is a view that is widely shared.

Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) in their research paper—'*Shifting paradigms: from a communicative to a context-based approach*'—hold to the opinion that the communicative based method has been widely adopted in 'everyday practice, and in parts of the world where this does not yet occur there is pressure to move in this direction' (2004:2). They subscribe to some detached linear

perspective that communicative methodology is the entrenched 'replacement of its audio-lingual or grammar translation predecessor' (2004:2). They further question that 'after a quarter of a century' of 'western context'-based 'dominance', whether the broader enveloping paradigm is in any way relevant or 'culturally appropriate' for Asian learners, owing to 'problems of implementing the approach within specific contexts'; moreover, that it is time to press ahead in search of a new paradigm (2004:3-4). In view of this, they undertook a "count-heavy" study of forty English language teachers and eight hundred students at The Language Institute, Dhurakypundit University in Bangkok, Thailand. They concluded that 'the combined responses from teachers and learners raise issues which question the validity and the viability of a number of the central tenants of CLT' in their cultural context (2004:13).

After a careful read of Jarvis and Atsilarant's (2004) paper, coupled with a critical gaze of their instrument items, overall design, and measures, I find the basis of their preconceived notions to be, in the least, fragile. While it is one matter to disavow any paradigm, theory or set of theories and corresponding methodology, it is indeed quite another to outright dismiss such on the basis of some vague findings with an ill-equipped instrument.

In this paper, I will provide a much needed detailed review of the literature which takes stock of a range of theory and related topic discussion, situated in the broader heuristic paradigm. Communicative language teaching principles are connected not just to theories of language learning, but are substantially intertwined with the curriculum-wide constructivist educational theory, as well as that of other disciplines, all of which is situated within the grand heuristic paradigm.

The second follow-on paper in the next journal publication will provide a

comparative analysis of the research from Jarvis and Atsilarat's (2004) study on the Thailand context; Savignon and Wang's (2003) examination of that in Taiwan; and, my own detailed survey research of the Japanese setting. In the second paper, I will conclude with an overview of the comparative features of the said studies. Such should offer some added insight as to how, with some educational contextual adjustments, adoption of CLT methodology could prove less problematic, if not more endearing to its stakeholders in the Asian EFL context.

### **Paradigm Change-what paradigm?**

'Paradigm "is a word too often used by those who would like to have a new idea but cannot think of one." -Mervyn King, Deputy Governor, Bank of England

In etymological terms, the word paradigm originates from the Greek word *paradeigma* which means "pattern" or "example" from the word *paradeiknunai* meaning "demonstrate". However, it was Thomas Kuhn, indisputably one of the greatest historians and philosophers of science in the twentieth century, who coined the concept *paradigm*. In his view, a *paradigm* should not result in definite solutions agreed by all participants of a discipline, but rather it is of such construct to be 'sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to solve' (1996:10).

Post-positivism took hold in the early 1980s replacing logical positivism and is now commonly referred to as the *heuristic paradigm*, which is based on human values, in a variety of fields including the philosophy of science, psychology, sociology, education, and linguistics. For those in the know, it nearly not be said that the heuristic paradigm draws from a significant good

lot of research in cognitive, psycho-social, and linguistic science, all of which demonstrates that knowledge is based on the use of heuristics-rudimentary understandings linked to conceptual frameworks that enable us researchers to organize knowledge and construct problems. Social scientists as a whole have ‘adopted the Kuhnian phrase *paradigm shift* to denote a particular social phenomenon...’ (Dictionary.LaborLawTalk.com); neither should *paradigm* nor *paradigm shift* be employed for use in a detached whimsical sense.

Theory is the basis upon which the features of matter-in this case, education praxis are constructed. Theorists-Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Kohlbert, Sternberg, Gardner, Bloom, Bruner, and the like-have all contributed in a significant way to the present and ever increasingly accepted constructivist educational theory. *Constructivism* is concerned with the ways in which learners, both individually and collectively, interprets or constructs the social and psychological world in specific linguistic, social, and historical contexts. Constructivism contradicts the tradition bound teacher-centered notion that learning is the transmission of content to a passive receiver; rather, that learning is an active process which is based on learner’s current understanding. The theory holds that learning is best facilitated when it is contextual-accounting for the students comprehension; active-engaging with learning activities that use analysis, debate, and criticism (as opposed to simple memorization) to validate the relevance and authenticity of information; social-using discussions, direct interaction with experts and peers, and team-based projects (Fenton 2005).

Constructivist Theory (Burner 1966) from the outset, promoted the theme that learning is an active process, whereby information is acted on in conjunction with prior, acquired knowledge. The learner chooses and alters information, constructs hypotheses, and engages in decision making with the

aid of a cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental models) that affords meaning and organization to experiences, and enables a person to move beyond the information provided.

The whole field of education has as of “late” largely embraced the core tenants of Constructivist theory-- spurred on by changed conditions enabled by relatively new information technologies and global information infrastructure developments (McCall 1994; Demchenko 1997). Sterling (2001: 58-59) provides as broad an interdisciplinary overview as any on the contrastive features between what we will refer to as a “paradigm-past” and a “paradigm-to-last”-a ‘mechanistic’ versus as ‘ecological’ view. In brief, Sterling’s framework is predicated on the belief that this broader paradigm transfer is operative on three levels: level one being the educational sphere; level two accounts for organizational and management of the learning environment; of which includes curriculum, evaluation and assessment, management, and community; level three pertains to learning and pedagogy and accounts for: view of teaching and learning, view of the learner, teaching and learning styles, and view of learning.

The “critical elements” which underpin the latest developments in the grand Heuristic *paradigm-to-last* are: **social presence, interaction, cognitive strategies, collaborative learning, and learner centeredness**. To follow is a succinct review of the literature will account for a *definition, principles* underlying its importance, and *operational activities*, both in the traditional face-to-face (F2F) learning environment as well as the ever-expanding global learning environment afforded by technology-the essence of both, however, being that of “communication” -increasingly so, “intercultural global communication”.

**Social presence** in both F2F and virtual settings entails the creation of an intellectual and emotional presence toward the aim of building a virtual community of learners (Gunawardena & Zittle 1996). Such a presence must constitute an atmosphere that is friendly, functional and social; fostering member participants with an attitudinal desire to interact and communicate with significant others in both asynchronous and synchronous communication (Collins & Berge 1996). F2F and the more recent-albeit, equally valid--on-line communication is more than words; it can be the degree to which members of a learning community are perceived as real people expressing both verbal and non-verbal cues in communicative form-be they written or spoken.

The *principles* underlying its importance of learning have been well documented. Learners who have a feeling that they are a part of a community or group are more likely to assume ownership for their learning and subsequently be more successful in their endeavors. In the context of on-line learning, the use of electronic tools can aid in developing a learning community, thus enabling the inception of meaningful participant discourse (Gunawardena & Zittle 1996). Providing a warm, respectful, and collegial environment will greatly enhance the sense of affiliation and solidarity among groups of learners. Community members need to regard their interactions as intrinsically valuable and educationally profitable (Rourke, *et al.* 2001). Further, an expert's social presence fosters affective knowledge acquisition, through modeling of behavior and attitudes. Learners, in turn, can gain vicarious insight through observing peers, mentors and experts performing tasks, potentially internalizing knowledge and related skills (McKendree, *et al.* 1998). Understanding requires articulation and reflection on what we know: these processes involve both internal and social negotiation, in which multiple perspectives are brought to bear in the refinement of ideas. Therefore, a learning environment, face-to-face or virtual, needs to be established and

maintained in which social negotiation of meanings can flourish (Jonassen, *et al.* 1995).

*Operational activities* for social presence, in a cursory sense-F2F or virtual-should include a warm opening and welcome on behalf of the facilitator, a brief overview of communication and discussion procedures; a welcome space where learner participants introduce themselves and provide an overview of their living or working situation; an active presence in the various discussion forums; facilitator reflection question prompts organized by forum; topic specific activities for participant groups; the timely monitoring and moderating of various interactions between participants; encouragement coupled with critical assessment of participation activities and assignment submissions; motivation of participant learners to actively participate through submissions and thoughtful responses to the contributions of others; such can entail synchronous as well as asynchronous interaction.

**Interaction** involves regular discourse among participant learners, and between learner and facilitator or topic experts; also, on-going interaction with content tools and the learning interface; all toward the aim of making meaning and constructing knowledge (Gunawardena & Zittle 1996; Jonassen 1998). Reushle (1995:149) notes that the ‘notion of interaction necessitates an integrated combination of learner control and active participation.’

*Principles* underlying its importance are that active engagement with the course participants enhances skill and competency development, coupled with the facilitation and construction of knowledge. It has been demonstrated that meaningful learner interaction of both a personal and professional nature, positively affects intrinsic motivation, thus enhancing one’s problem solving ability (Ragan 1998: 3). Perhaps most importantly, regular communication



between participants leads to mutually agreed knowledge constructs.

*Operational activities* should incorporate methods of engagement should be relevant to the specific needs of those participating in the course, and the corresponding learning activities (Laurillard 1993). The following points should be kept in mind: Utilize familiar content materials and software programs which lend ease to participant interaction; coupled with the appropriate technical support; use interactive cognitive tools (e-mail, simulation, etc.) F2F techniques to enable learning communication, collaboration and subsequent feedback; organize learning opportunities through activities which engage participants in task-specific thinking about course content; manage a discussion forum that is authentic in context and challenging, yet non-intimidating and “potentially” non-assessed.

**Cognitive Strategies:** Gagne; Briggs & Wager (1992) specify that a cognitive strategy is a ‘control process’ wherein participant learners identify and adapt their modes of participating, learning, retaining, and thinking. In essence, said strategies would empower internal control processes in a way that learners order and sequence information toward the ends of establishing their own mental prototypic notion.

*Principles* underlying its importance: Gunawardina & Zittle, *et al.* (1996) cite a host of techniques that can be invoked in the process of learning; namely, identified selection, organization, rehearsal and elaboration. They offer up four discernable categories of cognitive strategies: grouping or ‘chunking’ strategies, special learning strategies, and linking strategies. In short, learner participants and their cognitive strategies (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.) need to be complemented with the relevant instructional strategies in order to realize predetermined learner outcomes.

*Operational activities* need to be grounded in the knowing of how the target learner cohort, or individual learners, best acquire knowledge. Jonassen (1998) for example, asserts that a combined methodology of ‘objectivism’ and ‘constructivism’ offer varying perspectives; sequence learning activities via hierarchical structure of the target knowledge, thus ensuring that the basics have been acquired from the outset. Introduce active learners to the various cognitive strategies, coupled with related activities, which serve to impel the participation.

**Collaborative learning** is when individuals, or groups, work jointly in a co-operative manner to reflect on notions, issues and ideas from which they negotiate meaning, thus enhancing both the knowledge of the individual and the group as a whole.

*Principles* underlying its importance: Jonassen (1998) is of the mind that collaborative learning environments can ‘support constructivist learner-centered’ activities; activities that enable self-directed, active problem based real learning. Recent advances in computers and communication technology is enabling more learning participants to engage and collaborate across time and space. In addition, collaborative based activities can stimulate idea linking, idea construction and reflection; provide chances for the development of social presence; lend to the acquisition of varying perspectives through purposeful interaction; last, the opportunity to discern one’s own meaning, betters learner’s own construction of knowledge concepts, thus building on multiple viewpoints. Gunawardina & Zittle (1996) cite research that demonstrates such attributes as increased motivation, completion rates, and learner satisfaction, even performance in smaller groups, as a result of collaborative group work.

*Operational activities:* Teles (1993) identifies two operational activities with special relevance to learning: structured group collaboration and unstructured peer collaboration. In order to facilitate collaborative learning, activities need to revolve around meaningful discourse. Learners must discuss, negotiate and reflect with other students via computer-mediated communication; for as Jonassen (1995) writes: ‘Conversation is an essential part of the meaning-making process’. Finally, it is important to link up course content and reflection tasks that are both goal and process driven.

The **learner-centered** approach situates the emphasis on the learner and corresponding process learning; it’s about empowering the learner to assume responsibility for their own learning (from the inside out, rather than from the outside in; more freedom to choose, but more responsibility for those choices). In contrast, the instructor’s role definition is equally important. Rather than teaching, they need too assume the role of designer, facilitator, mentor and coach.

*Principles* underlying such pertain to motivating learners to adopt an active role in the organizing of learning activities. A great lot of the literature rooted in constructivist theory supports the notion that the active learner needs to build their own knowledge foundation from both previous experiential learning and newly negotiated meaning acquired through self-guided, collaborative problem based real learning (Jonassen 1995; 1998). Learners capable of determining their own learning goals, experience a higher task completion rate. Ideally, learners need to understand their context; become aware of their learning choices, the benefits and risks associated with each choice; discerning which choice is best for them, in their context and with their goals; acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to take control of their learning; achieving all of this is an individual context, with individual needs,

aims and aspirations.

*Operational activities* require systematic individualized mentoring and feedback. Organize learning activities so that task assessment reflects specified learning outcomes. The delivery of materials needs to be flexible, taking into account learner time constraints. The use of cognitive and computer tools for problem tasks providing technical support when required is normal.

### **Communicative Methodology-where's the fit?**

For most researchers and practicing teachers, a method is a set of theoretical unified classroom techniques thought to be generalized across a wide variety of contexts and audiences.

'Communicative language teaching methodology (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning' (Savignon 2002:1), with a central tenant being that of "communicative competence" (Savignon 2002; Hadley 2001), which was first introduced by the sociolinguist Hymes in 1972 and later strengthened by Canale and Sevain in the early 1980s (Beale 2002); it is no coincidence that the timing and constructs of CLT correspond with the underpinnings of Constructivist theory. A good lot of the literature on CLT refers to the seeming still unresolved discussion on meaning of communicative confidence and distinction between "competence" and "performance"; steering clear of that debate, we stress the agreed and somewhat obvious point-*communicative competence* refers to the 'underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication' (Canale in Beale 2002:1). "'Performance" is observable, and it is only through *performance* that *competence* can be developed, maintained, and evaluated' (Chomsky in Hadley, 2001:4). It then follows that *performance* requires production; borrowing in succinct from Beale

(2002:3-4) and Dalton, pedagogical principles of the communicative approach to language teaching for developing 'literacy across the curriculum' are as follows (1998:17):

1. Teaching is learner-centered and responsive to learners' needs and interests.
2. The target language is acquired through interactive communicative use that encourages the negotiation of meaning. The teacher interacts with students in ways that allow for individual preferences for speaking style, such as wait-time, eye contact, turn-taking, spotlighting.
3. Genuinely meaningful language use is emphasized, accompanied by unpredictability, risk-taking, and choice-making. Educators need to assist language development through modeling, eliciting, probing, restating, clarifying, questioning, and praising, as appropriate in purposeful conversation; all the while, providing frequent opportunities for students to interact with each other and themselves during instructional activities.
4. There is exposure to examples of authentic language from the target language community or subject area; learners are encouraged to utilize content vocabulary for communicative competence on content driven topics or themes deemed suitable for the learner.
5. The formal properties of language are never treated in isolation from use; language forms are always addressed within a communicative context. Learners are encouraged to discover the forms and structures of language for themselves.
6. There is a whole language approach to bridging student language with literacy and content area knowledge through those activities, and use of strategies that integrate speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.

It should now be evident that communicative language teaching principles

are not only connected to theories of language learning, but substantially intertwined with the curriculum-wide constructivist educational theory, all of which is situated within the grand heuristic paradigm. While there is general acceptance of there no longer being a single best method (Stern 1985; Nunan 1991; Richards 2002), and with the recent movement toward a more integrated approach on all levels (curriculum, theory, method), the fundamental principles of CLT method are no less suitable today in the expanded global community than when they were initially introduced. Admittedly—as Savignon (2002), Brown (2002), Nunan (1991) and others acknowledge—there has been an absence-of-focus on designer methods for specific contexts; however, we submit that such is precisely the challenge practitioners the world over need to embrace—especially in today’s very mobile intercultural communicative global forum. To conclude on this point, the rationale for such can be made on two inseparable levels: Congruence between the tenants of the communicative method and constructivist theory situated within the reigning heuristic paradigm; and, the continued move toward global interdependence or that which is more commonly referred to as *globalization*.

### **Communicative Competence for a Global Community**

In this revisionist era of neo-nationalism, the challenges accompanying the rapid pace of globalization has never been greater. Factors affected by changes in trade, technology, and ecology are surely among the most significant. One need only attend at an education fair to realize that education is now viewed as a viable commodity for export by governments of Canada, Australia, United States, and New Zealand, largely owing to the earlier noted advancements in information technologies and global information infrastructure, thereby enabling ready and reliable synchronized and a-synchronized communication—the same technologies in use by even the smallest of businesses.

Today's learners in economically advantaged and disadvantaged countries alike, are, as Ingram (2001:11), a linguist at Griffith University in Australia and an Adjunct Fellow with the National foreign Language Center in Washington DC, referred to as 'learners' long-term and on-going developmental needs'. Modern day language courses need to not only 'provide diverse experience but also be coherent and integrated with clearly established goals and objectives' organized around some 'cohering and integrating principle' (2001:11). Such, Ingram (2001:11-12) and others maintain, requires an approach to methodology described as being socially interactive or community-involved— *the global community*— 'both formal and informal, F2F, as well as online with speakers of the target language, and to use the target language for real communicative purposes'... for 'social human interaction'.

The achievement of learner communicative competence at a time when present day global development requires such, CLT methodology, if correctly interpreted and properly integrated, is no less appropriate in modernizing Asian cultural settings, than in so many others. Savignon (2002:7-8) drawing on her earlier work and that of others (1972, 1983, 1987, 2000; Canale and Swain 1980; Canale 1983; Byram 1986) presents and adapted version of the 'familiar "inverted pyramid classroom modelk"' which reveals that 'through practice and experience in an increasingly wide range of communicative contexts and events, learners gradually expand their communicative competence, which comprises grammatical competence, discourse competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence' (*see fig 1.1 in Savignon 2002:8*). Savignon's inverted pyramid classroom model of communicative language teaching is a contextually flexible and valid approach to communicative competence, when, at a time the need for globally competent speakers of English could not be greater.

## The Asian Paradigm Adoption Challenge-it's Heuristic... NOT Communicative

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." Albert Einstein

Ho (1998:1) provides a summary overview of the 'ELT terrain' in ten Southeast Asian countries including the English curricular changes afoot in the various cultures, with a changed emphasis on English teaching methodology. Ho (1988:7; Hato 2005) identified some general observations that apply almost uniformly across the whole of Asia. Those include his projection that the use of English will continue unabated as the region becomes increasingly 'interdependent in economic matters'. Adding to this is the likelihood that English will eventually become the official language in Loa PDR, it is now the official second language in Taiwan, and will perhaps soon be in a number of other Asian countries including Japan. The majority of Asian countries by now have at least introduced English as a subject into the primary school curriculum (Ho 1998; Hato 2005). The ELT curriculum now 'appears driven, at least in intent' by CLT and skills integration (Ho 1998:7).

In the more economically advantaged Asian countries, however, (Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and Thailand) where greater access to some form of postsecondary education is assured, competition for entry into prestigious universities is fierce and based almost solely on entrance discrete-point examination scores (Browne, *et al.* 1998; Zhenhui 2001). It therefore should come as little surprise that such a focus seems to propagate the heavy reliance on the grammar-translation method of instruction in the high school English classroom; coupled with the use of memorization and rote-learning, devoid of meaningful context. Such mirrors the values of a top-down centralized authoritarian paternalistic, not least, non-heuristic paradigm-past. Not only is



their little incentive for educators to adapt, adopt, and integrate the necessary constitutes which are conducive to the broader educational reforms shaping progressive global nations, but even less for learners who will likely go unrewarded in societies whose leaders pontificate policy reforms with ill-conceived action plans (Hato 2005; Brown *et al.* 1998; Brown 2004; McKay 2003; Kadish 2000). Here in Japan, where: English has been emphasized as a subject of instruction at Japanese junior and senior high schools since the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (Brown, *et al.* 1998); 2.45 billion yen was earmarked for English public education in 2002, alone (McKay 2003); and yet TOEFL scores ranks Japan 144<sup>th</sup> (in June 2001) coupled with the well documented ‘lack of motivation and general apathy’ (McKay 2003:2), most observers would surely feel compelled to join in chorus with the somewhat applicable common speak of Japan’s senior citizens, that “*the old ways no longer seem to work*”.

In the case of Thailand, still reeling from the collapse of a social economic policy first initiated some forty years ago, Brown’s (2004:2) reintroduction of ‘The Four Iddhipada’ which detail ‘valuable attributes that traditionally have enabled and enriched Thai learners’ are certainly worthy of reflection. Borrowing succinctly, they are as follows: first, will or aspiration, satisfaction and joy of learning; second, the diligent energy, effort and exertion required; third, attending wholeheartedly to the learning with active thoughtfulness; fourth, investigation, examination, reasoning and testing of the language being learned. Could these ancient Buddhist teachings equally apply to Japan as well as other Asian contexts? Might they proffer a bridge from those 2,500-year-old values to Sperling’s (2001) -previously detailed-ecological grounded adaptation of the heuristic paradigm: a paradigm-to-last active on multiple levels?

## Conclusion

This submission is the first of two papers, both of which examine and challenge the limited-in-perspective, and often ill-informed notions, held by instructors of EFL in many Asian settings. It was Jarvis and Atsilarat's recent publication in *Asian EFL Journal* that takes issue with the suitability of CLT methodology for the Asian context, which prompted this author to undertake a reflective review of the literature and undertake my own research. While it is one matter to disavow any paradigm, theory or set of theories, and corresponding methodology; it is indeed quite another to outright dismiss such on the basis of some vague findings with an ill-equipped instrument. It is evident that while communicative language teaching principles are connected to theories of language learning, they too are substantially intertwined with the curriculum-wide constructivist educational theory, as well as that of other disciplines, the lot of which is situated within the grand heuristic paradigm.

This first of two papers provided an expansive, yet integrated review of the literature which accounted of a range of theory and related topic discussion, situated in the broader heuristic *paradigm-to-last*, therein lending credence to the position that: CLT, if correctly interpreted and adequately integrated, is no less appropriate for modernizing Asian cultural settings, than it is in the context of so many other countries.

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